

OLDER ADULTS IN 2002

On average, boys born in the United States at the beginning of the 20th century could expect to live 46 years, while girls born at the same time could expect to live 48 years. At the beginning of the 21st century, life expectancy at birth was 74 for boys and 79 for girls.¹ Today's older adults—those 55 and older—are an important consumer market, as well as an influential social force. The U.S. Census Bureau plays an essential role in getting the facts on this dynamic population. Data on the older population in this chapter come from the Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC) to the Current Population Survey (CPS).

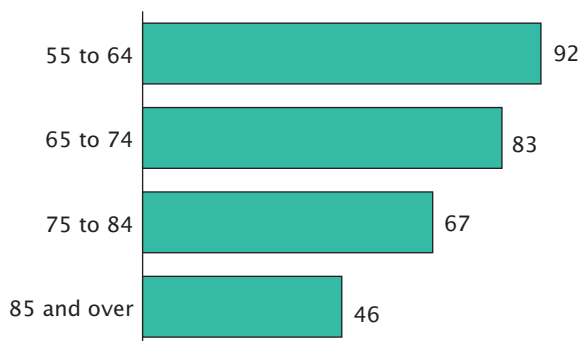
In 2002, 26.6 million men and 33.0 million women in the civilian noninstitutionalized population were 55 and older—creating a ratio of 81 men for every 100 women.² Within this age group, the sex ratio was highest among the younger group and lowest among the

¹ Source: U.S. National Center for Health Statistics, *Vital Statistics of the United States*, annual, and *National Vital Statistics Reports* (NVSR).

² The estimates in this report (which may be shown in text, figures, and tables) are based on responses from a sample of the population and may differ from actual values because of sampling variability or other factors. As a result, apparent differences between the estimates for two or more groups may not be statistically significant. All comparative statements have undergone statistical testing and are significant at the 90-percent confidence level unless otherwise noted. For more information on the accuracy of the data, see Appendix A.

Figure 1.
Sex Ratio of People 55 Years and Over by Age: 2002

(Men per 100 women)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 2002.

Words That Count

Life expectancy at birth is the average number of years that a person would live if he or she experienced the mortality rate at each year of age experienced by the actual population in a specific year.

oldest old.³ While the ratio was 92 for people 55 to 64, it was 46 for those 85 and older, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Marital Status

In 2002, 74 percent of men and 50 percent of women 55 and older were married and living with their spouse. This marriage gap widened with age. For those 55 to 64, 75 percent of men and 63 percent of women were married. The proportions changed to 58 percent of men and 12 percent of women for those 85 and older.⁴ Women have longer life expectancies than men, and they were more likely to be widowed than men. Among all people 55 and older, 9 percent of men and 31 percent of women were widowed.

Education

Eighty-four percent of people aged 55 to 64 held a high school diploma in 2002; the share dropped to 71 percent for those 65 to 84 and to 58 percent for those 85 and older. In most age categories 55 and older, women and men were equally likely to be high school graduates. Older men were more likely than older women to have a bachelor's degree or more education. For those 55 to 64, the male and female college graduation rates were 31 percent and 22 percent, respectively. For those 65 to 84, 22 percent of men and 13 percent of women were this well educated. In the oldest age group (85+), 17 percent of men and 12 percent of women had at least a bachelor's degree.⁵

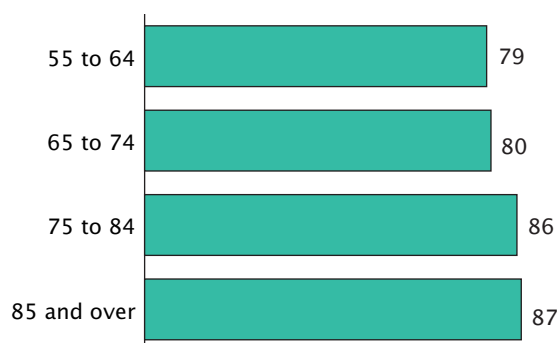
³ A sex ratio is the number of male residents per 100 female residents.

⁴ All data are for people who are married and living with their spouses. The percentage of men who were married and living with their spouses at age 55 to 64 was not statistically different from the percentage married and living with their spouses at age 65 to 85.

⁵ The percentages for women aged 65 to 84 and women 85 and older were not statistically different.

Figure 2.

Percent Non-Hispanic White Among All People Aged 55 and Over by Age: 2002



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 2002.

Labor Force Participation

In 2002, 77 percent of men aged 55 to 59 were in the civilian labor force. The rate dropped to 57 percent among those 60 to 64 and to 18 percent among those 65 and older. The labor force participation rate for women 55 to 59 was 63 percent. This rate dropped to 44 percent for women 60 to 64 and to 10 percent for those 65 and older.

Poverty Rates

In 2001, 10 percent of people 55 and older lived in poverty. Older women generally had higher poverty

rates than older men.⁶ Among those 55 to 64, 10 percent of women and 8 percent of men were in poverty. The rates for those 65 and older were 12 percent and 7 percent, respectively.

Diversity

Non-Hispanic Whites accounted for 69 percent of the total population in 2002. The proportion was larger among older groups—66 percent of the population under 55 and 81 percent of those 55 and over were non-Hispanic White. The percentage of non-Hispanic Whites reached 87 percent among the population 85 and older. (See Figure 2.)

⁶ References to poverty for individuals in 2002 are based on their incomes in calendar year 2001. See the chapter on poverty.

The Census Bureau Can Tell You More

For more detailed information, consult the following U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Report: *The Older Population in the United States: March 2002* (P20-546) by Denise Smith.

Look for complete reports and updated detailed tables on the Census Bureau's Web site <www.census.gov>. Click on "O" and select "Older (55+) Population Data."

Contact the Census Bureau's Customer Service Center at 301-763-INFO (4636) or e-mail <pop@census.gov>.